

When the Deacon Culled

By DONALD ALLEN

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There were few harder headed men in Ingham county than Darius Parker, farmer. He was reserved, obstinate and without a particle of romance or sentiment in his composition. The notes of the meadow lark were the same as the grunts of his hog to him, and when he looked out over the magnificent sweep of the meadow he simply figured on how many tons of hay to the acre it would cut. Persons who had known him for twenty years had never known him to betray a soft spot, and even when his wife died, after twenty years of cutting carpet rags and making soft soap, no one looked for any emotion on the deacon's part. He buried her the same as he went about plowing corn, and instead of taking a housekeeper he decided to cook his own meals.

No one looked for any change in Darius Parker, but one came within six months. The first sign of it was when he had his hair colored black and shaved off the whiskers that had hidden most of his face since he was a young man. When that nine day wonder had passed he had another surprise ready. He bought a new suit of clothes, including a long tailed coat, and began to wear paper collars on week days as well as Sundays. He was heard to speak of sunrises and sunsets and other sentimental things, and the hired man on the next farm overheard him one day humming a love song.

Inside of sixty days the deacon had half the county guessing what would happen next.

Aunt Sally Merriman was responsible for all the changes. The deacon went over to her house one day to borrow a farm implement and happened to mention that he was lonely. Aunt Sally had been waiting for such an opening for several weeks past.

"Now, deacon," she began, "sit down on the doorstep and let's have a talk. Betsy was a good wife to you. Her soft soap had no equal in the county, and we all had to go to her to find out how to make slapjacks. She was always sewing and darning and coloring, and she never sassed back when you ordered her around. You didn't cry at her funeral, but I know you appreciated her just the same."

"Yes, Betsy was a good wife to me," sighed the deacon.

"But she was took away."

"Yes, she was cut down."

"And you are living all stark alone."

"Yes."

"Deacon," continued Aunt Sally after a bit, "what would you do if you should have colic in the night?"

"I'd—I'd have to try to cure it, wouldn't I?"

"You would, but you might die twice over and none of us would know anything about it. Then there is the earache, the toothache, dizziness of the head, cold feet and a dozen other things. I fairly shiver when I think of what may happen to you any night."

"But how can I help it, Aunt Sally?"

"That's what I'm coming to. You order get married again."

"Good lands!" exclaimed the deacon as he flushed up.

"Yes, sir, you order, and I'm not the only one to say so. You are only a middle aged man, and the idea of your sloshing around alone all the rest of your life is preposterous. I am sure that Betsy would be glad to know that you had some one to care for you. How you manage to sleep I dunno, for no man on earth can make a bed fit to sleep in. Yes, Darius, you must marry again."

"But who'll I marry?"

"I've got that all fixed. I have a sister in Indiana who is a widder woman. She's coming out here to visit us purty soon. Sarah is a worker, just like Betsy used to be and just as economical. I've known her to make one pound of brown sugar last for two weeks. Her disposition is cheerful. She hasn't got a mite of temper, and the pair of you would get along like two doves."

"Wouldn't folks talk?" cautiously queried the deacon.

"What could they talk about? Hain't you got a right to get married again?"

"Of course, but you see I hain't got a headstone for Betsy's grave yet, and some one might say something mean."

"You can hustle around and get a headstone within a week, and Sarah won't care how many lambs are on top of it. Then you want to spruce up and look your best. I must tell you that Sarah is a little romantic, and you want to be the same. Washing and ironing will take it out of her after awhile, but you don't want to cut it off too short."

"I don't believe I could be romantic."

"Yes, you could. All you've got to do is to talk about shady dells, harvest moons, autumn flowers and floating clouds. Sarah has got over \$3,000 in cash in the bank, and it'll all be yours. I'm no matchmaker, deacon, but I tell you that you order marry and that the woman to fill the bill is my sister Sarah."

The deacon shouldered the hoe he had come to borrow and started for his cornfield, and as he worked he thought. By sundown he had come to a conclusion, and it wasn't many days before the barber in the nearest town was applying the dye to his grizzled locks. He began to notice the clouds, the sunsets and the wild flowers around him, and he had learned his lesson pretty well when Aunt Sally's sister appeared.

She had been posted by letter about the deacon and they got on well to-

gether from the start. Three nights a week the deacon went over to Aunt Sally's to spark Sarah and there was fresh grease on his hair every time. He did his best to be romantic and there was no doubt in his mind that he was succeeding when fortune played him a shabby trick.

He had been invited to supper, and after the meal he and Sarah wandered forth to see the sunset. By and by they found a seat on the top rail of the meadow fence, and as the deacon was thinking of something romantic to say he observed a spot where the goldenrod was growing in profusion. There was a connection between goldenrod, golden sunsets, golden hopes and golden beams, and he asked the widow if he might cull her a bouquet.

Some widows would have called him Oully and told him to cull away, but this widow simply cried out in her enthusiasm and said nothing so sweet was to be found in all Indiana. The deacon jumped off the fence and ambled across 200 feet of meadow for the flowers.

He cannot be held blameless for what followed. A farmer who has hunted the bumblebee to his lair a hundred times over should know when he is near that lair. There was a nest in the grass between the deacon and the goldenrod, but he did not dodge it. On the contrary, with a smile on his face and his heart beating faster than usual, he walked right through it. The insects were just going to roost for the night, but when their coat tails were trod on they changed the programme.

The deacon felt the very first sting. He also felt a dozen subsequent stings, and the romance in his soul disappeared like a summer frost.

When he started to run he galloped for the woods, but in his confusion he galloped the other way. The widow was sitting on the fence and wondering over his antics when he arrived. It made no particular difference to them whom they stung, and a score or more paid their attentions to the lady. The yells of the victims were heard for half a mile.

It took Aunt Sally and her husband and hired man and several brooms and branches to win the victory, and the deacon had to be led home and the widow carried to bed.

After a week she had recovered sufficiently to see the deacon out of one eye when he called. He still had a nose like a turnip, a cheek all swelled out and an ear that resembled a cow's. Aunt Sally met him at the door with a broom in her hand, and before he could say a word she exclaimed:

"Shoo! Shoo! Go away, deacon!"

"But what for?" he asked.

"'Cause you don't know romance from bumblebees, and Sarah wouldn't have you if you was the last man on earth. Go and cull some soft soap and water and soak your head!"

A Love Cure.

Two men who have country homes near the city were lunching together recently. Each of them has a daughter about seventeen years old. "Tom," said one of the men, "I've worried about my little girl. She has begun to pay so much attention to young men. There's one young fellow who hangs around her with whom I believe she is falling in love. I don't want her to marry until she's at least twenty-one. How do you manage your girl, or do you find you can manage her?"

"You bet I do," replied the other. "Here's a little scheme I work on her. Whenever I find my daughter is becoming too fond of a young man I simply have her invite him out to spend two or three days with us—for instance, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. When he leaves she is cured. Let a seventeen-year-old girl see a young man at breakfast, lunch and dinner two or three days in succession and you won't have to worry about her falling in love with him."—Kansas City Times.

His Diagnosis.

There had been a brilliant company at the home of a society lady, a woman whose husband, while a very worthy man, was noted rather for his wealth than for his mental attainments.

"Well, John," she said after the last visitor had gone and they had sat down to talk it over, "it was a complete success, wasn't it?"

"That's so," replied her husband, with a satisfied shake of his head.

"Did you notice Professor Muchman?" she inquired after a pause.

"He was the man with the bandage round his neck, wasn't he?"

"Yes, you heard him talk, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes; I heard him."

"What an astonishing vocabulary he has!"

"Well, that may be what it is," said John doubtfully, "but from the way he held his head I should judge it was carbuncle."—London Mail.

Called to Save Postage.

She had called to him with her best young man and in winding up the affair wrote him a letter which called for a reply. After he had abused himself on paper she intended to forgive him, but as the reply had not come at once she retired to her room for the usual feminine cry. Presently the bell rang, and as the maid was enjoying her night out she dried her tears hurriedly, scrambled her hair into shape and opened the door. There stood the young man.

"Come in," she said rather ungraciously, thinking that she could not be very dignified under the circumstances. "I wasn't looking for you," with the accent on the "you."

"Oh, I thought I'd come instead of writing and save a stamp. You're always telling me to practice economy."

As this was true, she had to forgive him. —New York Press.

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